Linguistic, Social and Cultural Factors Influencing Foreign Language Learning in the Context of Higher Education

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Abstract. This research aims to reveal main linguistic, social, and cultural factors influencing foreign language learning process from students' perspectives at non-linguistic (engineering) departments in one of the Kazakhstani universities, as well as to analyze the relationship between these factors and English language proficiency. The results of this study are presented in three sets of data obtained through observation, questionnaire and interview. While observation results revealed the factors that might influence engineering students' foreign language learning, the results of the Likert scale questionnaire displayed the influence of linguistic, cultural and social factors on the development of learners' foreign language proficiency. The last set of data describes the students' perceptions of the most important linguistic, cultural and social factors influencing their foreign language learning. Although linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the target and native languages differ considerably, it was found that social factors were the most influential ones from the students' perspectives.

1. Introduction

We strongly believe that learning a foreign language within tertiary education plays a significant role in foreign language proficiency development of non-linguistic major students.   Therefore, it is important for teachers and learners not only to understand the goals and ways of language teaching and learning, but to be aware of different factors possibly affecting these processes in order to reduce their negative impact. One of the fundamental theories, that our study is based on, is Krashen's (1982) Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis. According to it, there are two distinctive ways of developing communicative competence in a second or foreign language, where acquisition refers to informal, unconscious process whereas learning refers to formal, conscious process. In order to properly organize the formal study, we need to consider all characteristics of foreign language learning (FLL) which could be compared with 'complex nonlinear systems, a dynamic, complex, open, self-organizing, feedback sensitive, and constrained by strange attractors' process (Larsen-Freeman, 1997: 142) and 'long and complex undertaking' (Brown, 2000:1). In the process of integrating into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting a person is affected by various factors. Any foreign language methodology in the classroom is affected not only by the teachers, but also by the students, their expectations of appropriate social roles, the institutional demands, and factors connected to the wider sociocultural context in which the instruction takes place (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 7).

The word'factor' is defined by Cambridge Dictionary online as 'one of several things that affects or influences a situation'. Factors are considered as the environment of influence on students in the learning process. There are many general factors that influence FLL, such as age, aptitude, intelligence, cognitive styles, attitudes, motivation, and personality, teachers' expectations, classroom environment (Ellis,1994; Ortega, 2009).   These and others could be

classified into external factors (e.g., social, interactive, input based) and internal factors (e.g., LI transfer, cognitive processes, linguistic universals) (Ellis,1994; Mirhadizadeh, 2016). The factors could be classified from the point of a personality of learners: age, learning opportunities (both inside and outside the classroom), motivation to learn, and individual differences in aptitude for language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2001) and from the point of teachers: teaching techniques, methods and strategies (Ortega, 2009; Nguyen, Warren & Fehring, 2014).

Regarding non-linguistic specialties Rizhova (2011) revealed biological, social, affective and cognitive factors influencing the process of studying foreign languages, paying more attention to social-affective, presented by motivation and its two models: instrumental and integrative (Gardner &Lambert,1959). Instrumental motivation refers to learning to accomplish a task, such as passing a course, while integrative motivation refers to a favorable attitude toward the target language community, possibly a wish to integrate and adapt to a new target culture through the use of the language. The importance of instrumental motivation has been described more in the later studies while the significance of integrative motivation has continued to be emphasized. Both types of motivation are important to rise in students during foreign language learning at non-linguistic department.

Since considering all aforementioned factors related to FLL would be extremely difficult within the frame of one article, this study is aimed to investigate linguistic, social, and cultural factors influencing foreign language learning at engineering department in Suleyman Demirel University in Kazakhstan (hereinafter - University).

1.1. Linguistic Factors

There is a general theory that acquisition of a foreign language is influenced by the languages, that learners already know. It can be reflected in the learner's foreign accent, pronunciation, syntax, the way of unconscious structuring a sentence based on the patterns of mother tongue, use of wrong lexis, usually presented by false friends and others that may be referred to cross-linguistic interference (Mitchell and Myles, 2001). Other assumption of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) indicates that the more differences between first and second languages can be found, the more difficult it is for a learner to acquire a foreign language (Brown, 2000:207). At the same time, we need to take into account that the learner's experience gained in their first language (mother tongue) acquisition plays an important role in learning first and second foreign languages and in spite of cross-linguistic interference of the first language it allows to master the foreign language terms and notions quickly and consciously (Baryshnikov, 1998). The respondents of our study are mostly students, whose first language (mother tongue) is Kazakh, second language is Russian which is accepted as interethnic language because of multilingual context in Kazakhstan. English is taught

throughout the country as a foreign language. Moreover, according to institutional language policy, University students learn additionally Turkish language. All these languages belong to different language groups: Slavic, Germanic, and Turkic. This language diversity is a linguistic factor that may influence the process of FLL and development of English language proficiency.

Kazakhstani language learners are required to become multilingual specialists, regardless of the chosen major: linguistic or non-linguistic. Thus, one of the issues to be revealed in our research is whether the different language backgrounds and diversity of languages learnt by students influences the FLL process and development of English language proficiency.

1.2. Social Factors

It is obvious, that a human being learns languages as a means of communication: to perceive, express and interact with others only in a society that encourages its use.Therefore, social factor is defined as a driving force for the existence and development of any language. We strongly agree that social factors include parental and student's attitude to FLL, learning environment, learning opportunities, size of the learning group, student-teacher interaction, teacher's techniques and socio-economic status (Phon, 2017). Social environment includes not only relations and attitudes but also physical space, necessary for language learning: size andform of the classroom, light, noise, furniture, decoration, language equipment that may motivate all together FLL (Lozanov, 1978; Rizhova, 2011: 778). Parental and teachers' attitudes towards English language affect learner's attitudinal and motivational characteristics, encourage and supervise learners while learning process. Attitude refers to the way a person views something or tends to behave toward it, often in a critical way (Collins, 2004). Apart from their attitudes, the socio-economic status of parents and the type of the educational institution may influence the process of FLL. Our observations showed that the students who were enrolled in engineering department came from various schools (ordinary secondary school, gymnasium, lyceum, college) and had various foreign language backgrounds. As we have noted, students' attitude toward English language influences learners' academic success in general (Kazazoğlu, 2013). Meanwhile, motivation is also a key concept of the attitude on which students' achievements primarily depend. Lightbown and Spada (2001) claim that motivated students are noticed by their strong interest in the subject matter, active participation and their efforts to be seen in the classroom. Also, it should be noted that learners at the age of 17-18 are more socially oriented, good at negotiating, understanding and sustaining conversations, use more clarification requests and confirmation checks and prefer to cooperate better than young learners. Thus, one of the foci of our study is to reveal the students' perceptions of social factors in FLL.

1.3. Cultural Factors

Majority of scientists accept language and culture as an egg and chicken question, because they are inseparable. Learners of aforeign language have to develop the knowledge of culture as well as knowledge of the language. Disregard of this connection may result in cultural shock and misunderstanding, disorientation, frustration, and anxiety (Schumann,1986). For a student who has a low level of foreign language proficiency (most of University non-linguistic department students), learning new language and culture: values, beliefs, worldview and mentality seems to be challenging, if the teacher does not connect students' own cultural views with culture of the target language. This is crucially significant for students of Asian culture who study acompletely different language and cultural pattern. Moreover, cultures which are somehow similar can increase social contact, whereas cultures that are not congruent do not (Spolsky, 2004). According to Brown, Malmkjær and Williams (1996), cultural factors include problems of cultural stereotypes, learning a second culture, attitude toward certain culture, the relationship between thought, language and culture. Cultural differences may cause misunderstandings, since the same words, expressions, non-verbal behavior may not mean the same to various peoples. It should be noted that the basic coursebook used in the University to teach English in non-linguistic departments is "New English File" by Clive Oxenden and Christina Latham-Koenig (2008).The question whether this course book at Intermediate level contains cultural issues or not was a subject of critical analysis done by Seda Tash (2010). The researcher claims that this textbook is focused on culture of the target language, it does not consider Asian culture, does not promote an awareness of cultural differences that is a base for developing intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1990). We also claim that most assignments in the textbook are designed according to western mentality, thus presenting some difficulties to our learners.

In view of all that has been mentioned above, this study seeksto answer the following research questions:

1. Are the students of engineering department aware of social, cultural, and linguistic factors and their influence on foreign language learning?

2. What are the engineering department students' perceptions of these factors?

3. What is the relationship between these factors and the development of the learners' English language proficiency?

2. Method

The researchers used both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure the validity, reliability and objectiveness of the study. The correlationanalysis was applied to measure several factors and to examine whether they are associated and to what extent they are correlated with participants'

language proficiency.The participants of the study included 100 first and second year engineering faculty students of University that are involved in foreign language learning. The researchers employed the following data gathering instruments: observation, questionnaire, focus group interview. Eight groups from engineering faculty were selected for non-participant observations and each observation lasted 50 minutes for almost four weeks. The main focus of the class observation was to identify main factors that are influencing engineering students' process of English language learning. Based on the observation results, the statements of a structured Likert scale questionnaire were developed to elicit the students' answers related to linguistic, cultural, and social factors. A primary concern of the questionnaire was to reveal which factors affected the process of foreign language learning and whether the influence was negative or positive; additionally, it enabled us to identify the correlation between these factors and the development of English language proficiency. Since some students did not have sufficient level of English, this questionnaire was translated into Kazakh and Russian languages to achieve reliable results. The questionnaire allowed researchers to collect data in a short and limited amount of time.

Focus group interview was taken from ten 1st and 2nd year engineering students of various majors at engineering faculty, such as Information Systems, Computing systems and software, and Mathematics. As this study was interested in understanding the perceptions of students, it was felt that a focus group approach was most appropriate to provide a validity and reliability of results, obtained by researchers through observation and questionnaire. The reason for utilizing a focus group, rather than individual interviews, was pragmatic, as it is perceived as a tool that can provide relevant data (Kamberelis&Dimitriadis, 2013:3). The researcher can observe and listen to the interaction, thereby having a vantage point of picking up unnoticed phenomena. Observation, questionnaire and interview were conducted and arranged by the leading researcher with the permission of the teachers and with due consideration of their convenience and time availability. Prior to undertaking the investigation, all participants gave informed consent. Questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary; interviewees' names were coded to provide confidentiality.

3. Findings of Observation

The results of the observations enabled the researchers to identify the factors possibly influencing engineering students' FLL.During the non-participant observation of English lessons in eight groups the researchers have noticed the problems with classroom management and classroom set-up: overcrowded classes, mixed level students, grammar centered teacher's instructions, lack of the interactive activities and target language environment. Most of students were not satisfied with the way of providing opportunities in

the classroom: to speak, to work in groups, in pairs and individually, to learn from each other, and practice language items in the class.

Table 1. Observation analysis.

Classroom management	Classroom set-up
Similarities: *I noticed that the majority of the groups are having troubles because of the overcrowded and mixed level classrooms. Due to the mentioned factors above, some teachers could not manage his\her class. Sometimes students get bored, had a huge noise, and even it was noticeable that students were not engaged in the lessons. I also noticed that most of the teachers focus on teaching the grammar rather than preparing students to speak in real world context.*	**Similarities:** *I have found that a lot of students are not satisfied with the way of the providing opportunities in the classroom. By opportunity we mean opportunities for learning such as to speak, work in groups, pairs and individually, to learn from each other, and practice language items in the class.*
Differences: *Teacher of the 3rd (C5) and 4th (C6) groups was mainly focused on providing an interaction between students which lead learning from each other. It was noticeable that she was talking less than other teachers. She had more activities in order to make students speak and practice learnt materials.*	**Differences:** *Teacher has grouped up three students with different levels in one group and made them work together. In most cases, this technique does not work without control of the teacher. For instance, they began to use their L1 if they had some difficulties while explaining certain parts of the book. It was usually happened when the teacher could not see them.*

4. Findings of Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was to identify positive or negative influences of social, cultural, and linguistic factors on the process of FLL and to establish correlations between these factors and the development of engineering students' language proficiency. Students were asked to indicate to what degree they agree\disagree with the statements given (1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree).The data collected from the questionnaire was entered to IBM SPSS Statistics Viewer for coding and analysis. Spearman's rho correlation was used to calculate the relationship between students' levels of English proficiency as a result of their language

learning and (i) social factors (student's attitude, learning environment, learning opportunities), (ii) cultural factors (differences & similarities of culture), (iii) linguistic factors (language differences & similarities). As for students' levels of English proficiency, the researchers used the results of the engineering students' first placement tests from SDU Continuing Education Center (CEC), and results of current English proficiency test.

Table 2. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (rs) between students' attitude (social factors) and students' language proficiency

			Proficiency Test Scores	Studying English in the future	Using English in professional life
Spearman'srho	ProficiencyTestScores	CorrelationCoefficient	1,000	-,085	,087
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,485	,475
		N	100	100	100
	I wish to study English in the future	CorrelationCoefficient	-,085	1,000	,216
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,485	.	,072
		N	100	100	100
	I expect it to be useful in my professional life	CorrelationCoefficient	,087	,216	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,475	,072	.
		N	100	100	100

As can be seen in Table 2, there is no relationship between engineering students' English language proficiency (rs= -0.85,p=0.485) and students' attitude toward English language even if students' attitude is positive. The Spearman's rho correlation coefficient is lower than -1and p value is higher than 0.005, it means there is no correlation between two things. The positive attitude toward language is considered as a positive factor that is influencing non-linguistic department student's language learning, however among above sub-questions the correlation between student's attitude and their language proficiency is the weakest. It means, engineering students are positive to learn English language because of its necessity in their future professional life, but it is not enough to succeed in their learning.

Table 3. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (rs) between teacher's instruction and techniques in the classroom (social factor) and student's language proficiency

			Proficiency Test Scores	The teacher's technique and instructions
Spearman's rho	ProficiencyTestScores	CorrelationCoefficient	1,000	,335**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,005

I find English learning difficult because of the teacher's technique and instructions	CorrelationCoefficient	,335**	1,000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,005	.	
	N	100	100	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 above shows that teacher's instruction and techniques in the classroom have moderately correlated with the engineering students' English language proficiency (rs=0.335, p=0.005). Based on the findings, engineering students found learning environment, created by teacher not appropriate to learning, so this factor is affecting their language proficiency negatively. It means, teachers did not provide clear and effective instructions to the learners. The analysis reveals that teacher's techniques in the classroom have a huge effect on students' English proficiency levels.

Table 4. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (rs) between learning environment (social factor) and student's language proficiency

			The lack of the interactive activities	ProficiencyTestScores
Spearman'srho	I find English learning difficult due to the lack of the interactive activities	CorrelationCoefficient	1,000	,493**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,000
		N	100	100
	ProficiencyTestScores	CorrelationCoefficient	,493**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	.
		N	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As illustrated in Table 4, the lack of activities and learning opportunities are significantly correlated with the engineering students' English proficiency (rs=0.493, p= 0,000). Accordingly, the results of the analysis reveal a strong link between proficiency test levels of the students and interactive activities that are less used in the language learning classroom.

Table 5. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (rs) between cultural differences and attitude toward culture (cultural factors) with student's language proficiency

			ProficiencyTest Scores	Inadequacy of some English assignments	Interest in American & British culture
Spearman'srho	ProficiencyTestScores	CorrelationCoefficient	1,000	,442**	,010

		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,046	,932
		N	100	100	100
I find it difficult because some English tasks, assignments and exercises are not suited to our mentality (Cultural Factors)	CorrelationCoefficient	,442**	1,000	-,142
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,046	.	,242
	N	100	100	100
I would like to learn American & British culture because it will help to avoid misunderstandings (attitude toward culture)	CorrelationCoefficient	,010	-,142	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,932	,242	.
	N	100	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 demonstrates the relationship between students' cultural differences (rs=0.442, p=0.046) and their language proficiency levels. The students found English learning difficult because some tasks, assignments and exercises were not suited to their mentality. Cultural differences have moderately correlated with engineering students' language proficiency; it means the differences in mentalities have significant impact on student's English language proficiency. However, students' positive attitude toward American and British cultures has no correlation (rs=0.010, p=0.932) with their language proficiency. It shows whatever their attitudes toward western cultures are it does not influence their language learning.

Table 6. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (rs) between language differences (linguistic factors) with student's language proficiency

			Proficiency Test Scores	First and Second, Language Difference	First and Second, Language Similarities
Spearman'srho	ProficiencyTestScores	CorrelationCoefficient	1,000	,168	,034

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,166	,780
	N	100	100	100
I find it difficult to learn grammatical structures of English language because it is different from my mother tongue (LF, Language Differences)	CorrelationCoefficient	,168	1,000	,126
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,166	.	,297
	N	100	100	100
I find it easy to learn grammatical structures of English language because it is similar with Russian grammar (Linguistic Factors, LS)	CorrelationCoefficient	,034	,126	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,780	,297	.
	N	100	100	100

In table 6, according to Spearman's rho correlation coefficient, there is no relationship between student's language differences (similarities) and their language proficiency levels. It is noticeable that coefficient of language differences (rs=0.168, p=0.166) is higher than +-1, so it does not demonstrate any impacts on engineering students' English language proficiency. Moreover, even if students have similarities in language items, there is no progress in their language proficiency. So, linguistic factor has no positive or negative effect on students' language proficiency. Some students found English learning difficult because some language items were not similar to their mother tongue; however some of them found several similar items. Although there are similarities and differences in languages, they have no impact on engineering student's language proficiency levels.

5. Focus Group Findings

In addition to the results of questionnaire and classroom observation, ten students were interviewedin order to triangulate the received data.

5.1. Participant's Perceptions and Awareness of the Factors Influencing Their FLL

The focus group interviews explored engineering students' awareness and perceptions of the most important factors influencing the development of their English language proficiency. Interestingly, the participants perceive the word "factor" as a negative concept and define it as the "obstacles" or difficulties which prevent them from learning the target language.

"I think the definition of the factor is something that affects our process of learning foreign language, isn't it?" S1

"In my opinion, factors are things that are preventing us to learn English language." S2

5.2. Social – Affective Factors (Attitudes towards English Language and Culture)

The researchers believe that a positive attitude towards English language and culture will positively influence engineering students' language learning whereas negative attitude negatively. The nine students had positive attitude toward English language whilst only one student showed his negative attitude. Following comments on positive attitudes towards English language learning:

"I learn English because I need it for my future, for my job and education." S3

"I think it is world language, so nowadays every person should speak in English." S2

"My profession is related to Computer sciences; therefore, it is important to know English to be competitive in the future." S1

From these comments, we can conclude that engineering students have real understanding of the importance of English language, even though their language proficiency tests showed a low proficiency level, in average 75 points. From ten students only one student has a negative attitude, however this student also admits the importance of English.

"I thought I would not need English in my profession because we are engineers, not linguists. It turned out almost all lessons and lectures are in English." S10

5.3. Social Factors (Learning Environment and Opportunities)

The mixed level students and large classes are considered as social factors (environment). Moreover, respondents claimed that teachers could not cope with the teaching process due to the mixed level students and large classes. Several of these students commented that large classes influence the quality of learning and teaching.

*"I feel somehow embarrassed in front of people who are speaking very well and I may not speak."*S5

*"Teacher cannot pay attention to every student's learning process."*S4

*"Yes, it influences a lot, because a lot of students make a huge noise."*S1

However, one of the respondents claimed that he enjoys studying lessons in mixed level classes, because higher

level students motivate him. It can be concluded that engineering students perceive these factors differently. Learning environment is also important for both teachers and students. Interviewer aimed to identify whether teacher provides learning opportunities such as speaking in the classroom, working in pairs, practicing language items in class, discussing, sharing opinions and preparing special learning environment for students. This aim was derived from students' responses about their teacher's techniques; therefore, it is essential to explore whether these factors influence engineering student's language proficiency or not.

"No. We do not have time for different kind of activities and our teacher is not able to spend classroom time properly."S7

"No, in our group we do not have such things. In my opinion, in most English classes our teacher does not create such atmosphere in class, therefore we cannot speak, but we should learn how to speak."S6

The students claimed that lack of the speaking activities, lack of the suitable learning environment influence their language learning process. Engineering students proposed that it would be better if each teacher found a strategy for every student.

"Teacher spends time to explain only grammar and to do a lot of exercises. We do not have games, debates and different kind of activities."S5

"I cannot remember such kind of activities; we are having only grammatical activities." S8

It shows that teachers who teach future engineers concentrate on grammarmore than on speaking. However, engineering students are aware of the importanceof speaking skills and require more speaking activities.

5.4. Linguistic Factors (Language Differences, Native Language Effect)

Ortega (2009) claims that language differences and similarities influence learner's second language proficiency. In this study, the participants are foreign language learners who know at least three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and Turkish), the researchers assume an awareness of three and more languages will influence engineering students' language proficiency positively, because of gaining language learning experience.

The students were responding to the statement "Some believe that Russian speakers learn English easier and faster than Kazakh speakers, because some elements of Russian language are similar to English".

"No, I do not think so. First of all, our Kazakhstan is multinational, so that's why for us it is easier to gain another language." S7

"I think no. For example, in our group there are a lot of students whose first language is Russian, but they have low level of English competency."S8

"I think to learn pronunciation and words are easier for Kazakhs rather than Russian speakers." S4

Majority of participants are Kazakh speakers; they perceive that language differences do not interfere with learning a foreign language and to the students' mind Kazakh speakers tend to learn other languages easier than Russian speakers.

5.5. Cultural Factors (Cultural Differences)

Traditionally, the majority of English course books describes life and situations from a western point of view and contains only the target culture material which can be difficult for the non-western learners' perception as Kazakhstani ones.We agree with McKay (2003) that the teaching only target language culture will not always motivate English language learners, on the contrary, in some cases 'may be largely irrelevant, uninteresting or even confusing for students'.As a consequence, the students can be demotivated to continue FLL. Obviously, each culture has its own rules, norms and values, therefore the teachers and learners should be aware of English as a means of international communication.

"Sometimes, we may have some topics in our course books that are not suitable to discuss to our mentality. In such kind of topics, I cannot find the way to speak."S3

Attitudes towards certain culture also influence engineering students' foreign language proficiency either negatively or positively. It is supposed that students who have positive attitude towards culture have good level of English language proficiency whereas students with negative attitude have a low level.

"I think cultural differences will not influence our language learning, because we should tolerate them, every culture has own crazy things."S7

"I grew up in Kazakh family and I have some kind of comprehension what to do and what not to do. But in America every person is free, and they do not get shamed." S3

It can be seen that amongst participants some of the respondents do not consider cultural differences as a negative factor influencing engineering students' language proficiency. They believe every culture has its own differences and foreign language learners should tolerate them. Students should learn differences in cultures in order to avoid misunderstandings. Moreover, teachers should be aware of the learners' mentality andcarefully design the cultural topics and assignments in the classroom in accordance with the three types of material (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999) - source culture materials, target culture materials and international target culture materials.

6. Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

In FLT there is a common assumption that learning a foreign language is strongly influenced by linguistic, cultural and social factors, especially, when target language and culture are different from learners' native language and

culture as in Kazakhstani case.Therefore, our study made an attempt to check this assumption by examining the Kazakhstani English learners' perception of the factors, influencing their language learning process. Moreover, the study attempted to establish correlations between the social, cultural, and linguistic factors and the development of English language proficiency.

First, on the basis of observation analysis the social, cultural and linguistic factors were identified that could probably influence the FLLprocess. Then, the questionnaire results clarified the positive and negative impact of these factors. Significantly, the Spearman's rho correlation analysis showed a strong link between the social factors and learners' language proficiency. Overcrowded classes, mixed level students, ineffective learning environment and lack of learning opportunities were the most influential social factors that affected the learning process negatively.

However, the results raised some doubts regarding the dominant influence of linguistic and cultural factors on FLL. A moderate correlation has been found between cultural differences and engineering students' language proficiency whereas there was no relationship between students' language backgrounds and their language proficiency levels. Moreover, the analysis of the interview in the focus group also indicated the social factor as the most crucial factor influencing English language learning. In fact, interview results confirmed the nature of the influence and the relationship between the factors and foreign language proficiency development. Thus, in spite of considerable differences between the students' first (Kazakh/Russian/Turkish) language and foreign (English) language, native culture and target culture, students of the engineering department perceive the social factor as the main one that contributes to the success or failure of language learning.

Nevertheless, the learners' cultural background, creation of a proper cultural environment within the English classroom should be taken into account by the foreign language teacher in order to avoid any language and cultural misunderstandings, confusing and awkward situations that may demotivate foreign language learners. Besides, the teacher should be able to use linguistic similarities in the native and target languages, thus strengthening the positive influence of linguistic factors.

So, this research reconsiders the commonly shared assumption related to factors that may influence foreign language learning from the learners' perspectives. It provides readers with a better comprehension of the process of learning English by non-linguistic department students (engineering) in the context of Kazakhstani higher education. It gives them some glimpses of challenges that the students at non-linguistic department face, difficulties that they encounter in the English language classroom. The study suggests the learners, teachers, administrators, and educational policymakers to seek for effective measures to weaken negative factors and strengthen positive ones which influence foreign language

learning and the development of language proficiency.

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